

Fallen Angel by **jhuniemarieilarde**

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Summary: Joyce and her family moved to New York to start a new life but their nightmare continues when the Russians kidnapped Joyce. Hopper is being kept a prisoner in Russia when he found out Joyce was taken there too. Will, El, and Jonathan reunited with their friends to seek help. As Hopper plot a way to rescue Joyce, will he be on time to save her? #jopper

1. Chapter 1

Few weeks after Joyce Byers and her kids (including Eleven) moved out of Hawkins to start a new life in New York. Everything is all setup. She managed to work her way to being Eleven's guardian legally. She and Will are already enrolled in a new school while Jonathan is attending NYU while taking a part time job at the coffee shop near the campus. Meanwhile, Joyce got a job at the supermarket. She knows she can do better than being at the counter but she's comfortable with it and the pay is better than in Hawkins.

Will and El are at their schoolmate's apartment when she got home. They called her earlier to let her know that they got a school project that they needed to finish and that their schoolmate's mother will drop them off afterwards. She called out but it seems that Jonathan is doing overtime at the shop. She's all alone. She made some dinner and put it on the table. Suddenly, the emptiness of the house hit her hard. It's like she's getting claustrophobic in such huge space. She's about to have a panic attack when her hand found the pack of cigarette inside her pocket. Joyce quickly went outside the balcony of their apartment and lit one. The kids were always with her the past few weeks so she never felt alone but now that they're in school and Jonathan is working, trauma is catching up with her. She closed her eyes and all she can see is Jim's face as he smiled at her before she turned the keys.

"Ouch", she exclaimed after the cigarette burnt her fingers. She stared at it and realized that she's been inside her head again for quite some time...some time that her newly-lit cigarette has been wasted.

It's all too much. Even the cigarette is not helping her anymore. Suddenly the questions started popping inside her brain. *'What was he doing near that thing in the first place?' 'Why didn't he just run to me first so we can turn the keys together?' 'Why does he have to die?'*

She sighed. It's pointless to ponder about those questions now. He's gone and there's nothing she can do about it now. El will never be with her father again and she will never get a chance to tell him how she really feels. She was about to lit another cigarette when she heard the door. Joyce walked back inside the apartment and checked if the

kids are back.

"Will? El? Are you guys home?" she called but no one answered. "Jonathan?" she tried for her oldest son but still no answer.

Her heart started pounding. It's happening again, she thought. She forced herself to think otherwise. They are in New York. There's a great distance between the city and Hawkins. It couldn't be possible for those monsters to find them there, if they are back. She went to the kitchen and put down the pack of cigarette on the table and took a deep breath. They are safe. There is no point of worrying again.

Joyce gasped when someone grabbed her and covered her mouth with a white handkerchief. She tried to turn around but she couldn't. She knows that there's something in the handkerchief and she wanted to resist breathing but doing that would be impossible. At one point, she has to breathe or she will pass out. She couldn't hold it in and she inhaled. The drug worked quickly and she went unconscious.

Will and El came running inside the apartment half an hour later. El put down her bag on the couch and went straight to the kitchen to greet her mother but she didn't find her there.

"Mom, we're home!" Will shouted from the living room.

"She's not here", El said.

Will followed her into the kitchen and found the dinner ready but cold. He looked around and found no sign of Joyce.

"You think she went somewhere?" El asked him.

"Her car is parked outside and there's food on the table", he answered as if he doesn't want to recite the facts.

The door opened and the two kids came running thinking it's Joyce but it's Jonathan with some takeouts. He looked at the two kids with wide eye puzzled at the expression on their faces.

"Why? What's wrong?" he asked sensing the fear from them.

"We couldn't find Mom", Will answered.

Jonathan frowned. Like his mother, he thought that what the two kids were thinking is impossible. They're in New York. He put down the takeouts on the table and searched the entire apartment but he couldn't find her either.

"Where do you think she is?" El asked.

"Maybe she came back to the store...extra shift", he guessed and picked up the phone and called the supermarket.

"Hey, Alice. It's Jonathan. Is my mom there? Yeah, you sure? Alright. Nothing. Thanks", he said and then put the phone back on the hook.

"She's not there, is she?" Will asked.

They just looked at each other not wanting to acknowledge the possibility of the nightmare they escaped coming back at them. Suddenly, El's eyes gazed at something on the table. She went there and picked it up.

"She was here", she muttered. The two boys looked at her. "She never leaves the house without her cigarettes. She always carries this inside her pocket...always", she added.

Jonathan knows that too. He also saw her car outside and he knows only her mother can arrange the dining table like that.

"I think we need to call our friends in Hawkins", he suggested.

Meanwhile in Russia, a man is tied up on a chair with his head down when a general came in his cell. He spoke with one of the soldier first in their native tongue before the soldier left them to be alone.

"Good morning, Mr. Jim Hopper", the Russian general greeted.

Hopper looked up and saw the general looking back at him. His beard has grown and he lost a bit of weight. He developed some dark circles around his eyes but he never lost the fire in them.

"I got some good news for you. This morning I received a present from my men. They got the present from your country. Lovely, lovely gift. I'm pretty sure you will love to see the present too", the general continued.

Hopper just scoffed and rolled his eyes around.

"I don't have time for your charades", he muttered.

The general only laughed at him.

"What do you want?" Hopper asked becoming a little annoyed at his annoying laugh.

"I wanted you to tell me who you work for. I know you're working for someone in your government or you would have never infiltrated our base and ruined our experiment. So I will give you another chance. Tell me what I want to know", he answered.

Hopper looked directly in his eyes.

"I don't work for anyone. I infiltrated your experiment because it's killing people in my town", he said without even blinking.

The general stared at him for a moment searching for a hint of hesitation in his eyes but he found none. He smirked.

"You're a tough guy to break. They're lucky to have you. Let's see if your comrade is as tough as you", he said.

That got Hopper's attention real quick. He has been throwing the present bullshit in his face since the moment he opened his mouth. He didn't quite get it at first and he thought he's just teasing him but now he thinks he has something that is worth causing him worry.

"Who do you mean?" he asked in a serious low tone.

The general smiled at the satisfaction of bringing fear and nervousness to Hopper.

"A woman...a very lovely and scared woman we found in New York. She was very difficult to find. She and her family left Hawkins and

moved to the city but my men are good. They found her and brought her here. She's in the room across the hall. I made sure that she will be put there so you will feel close to her. She was with you that night. It was her who closed the gate completely. I believe her name is Joyce Byers", he answered.

It's like Hopper's world just exploded upon hearing her name came out of the Russian general's mouth. He accepted his fate of being a prisoner for life or the thought of dying in another country without saying goodbye to his daughter and to Joyce because he thinks the nightmare is over and that they are safe. He knows Joyce will take care of El no matter what. He was wrong. They moved out of Hawkins and they still got to her and now Joyce is sharing the same fate as he does.

"Don't you even dare touch her or I swear I will tear you apart", Hopper threatened the general.

The general can sense the fear getting stronger in him. It is something that he's been waiting to see in him. Torture never broke him before but now he knows the only thing that will break Jim Hopper is Joyce.

"Don't worry. We have a lot of things in mind for her. You will hear her soon from across the hall. Perhaps you should try to shout some word of encouragement for her when we interrogate her, give her strength to carry on. I'll see you soon, Hopper", the general replied and then left him alone.

Anger flooded Hopper in a flash as well as the desperation to get out of his cell and save Joyce.

"Leave her out of this! She got nothing to do with any of this, you Russian motherfuckers!" he yelled in anger and in helplessness.

Joyce opened her eyes and found herself in a very bright room. There are lights everywhere and it's making it difficult for her to open her eyes completely. She tried to move but she's tied onto a chair and her feet are underwater. Joyce looked down and saw wires inside the basin where her feet are. She tried to break free but the ropes are tied up tight around her.

"Hello? Is anyone there? I think you made a mistake here. You got the wrong person!" Joyce shouted hoping someone will come in and let her out.

The door suddenly opened the general came in with two guys behind him. Joyce halted upon seeing that they're Russians. Last time she saw one of them, Hopper ended up dying.

"I think we got the right person, Ms. Byers", he greeted.

They closed the door and the two soldiers placed themselves in front of two monitors on each sides of Joyce. Her breathing is becoming fast and it's not far before she gets overwhelmed by her panic attack.

"Do you know why you're here?" the general asked her.

"...because we stopped your plans to open something you don't understand", she answered firmly despite her fear.

"That is right. You intervened into a Russian business and cost us a lot too. That was a big mistake, Ms. Byers. My government wants to make whoever is responsible behind this pay. Of course, you're directly involved in this but we are willing to show mercy. Just tell us who you're working for and you can be home with your family again", he explained.

A feeling of disgust arises from within Joyce. She stared at his cold eyes. She can never believe how a man can let a lot of people die just to make a discovery.

"Mercy? You call that a mercy? The moment you caused a small crack onto that portal, a lot of people died, not only the people living in Hawkins but also you're men. Still, you wanted to open the damn thing and unleash the monster living in that world not caring how many lives will be lost in return and you still think you are capable of showing mercy? You are heartless son of a bitch", Joyce exclaimed in her rage and frustration.

It made the general quite impressed with her composure and strength. In his mind, he thought she and Hopper are the same. They are both not easy to break.

"Very well then...there are a lot of ways to break people and besides, you are not here to talk. You are here for something else. That's what happens when you crossed with us. You suffer", he replied and then nodded at the two soldiers.

The two pressed a button and the electricity flowed from the lights and went straight to the wires into the water and Joyce screamed in pain.

2. Chapter 2

Jonathan and the kids drove back to Hawkins. He already called Nancy and they're waiting for them at the Wheeler's. El never thought they would be back in Hawkins right away. Joyce promised her they'll visit on Christmas season so she can be with Mike for the holidays. She clenched her fist in her frustration. She felt like there's nothing she can do to help. Her powers are not yet coming back at her and it felt like without it, she's useless.

Will noticed her silence. He knows what she's thinking. They've been spending a lot of time together and he gotten good at reading her moods. She's also been vocal about everything to him including how hard it is for her not having her powers. Now, he can sense that she's blaming herself again and that she's feeling useless once more.

"Hey, we'll find her. We will", Will said to her.

"How can you be so sure?" El asked.

"You found me. I was gone for a long time and still you found me. I was possessed with the Mind Flayer and you got it out of me. You lost your powers and still you got through Billy and he died as himself and not the Mind Flayer's puppet. If there's anyone who can find Mom, it's us...together...all of us", Will answered and it made El felt better.

Joyce's screams rang throughout the hall of the Russian prison. It's torture for Hopper to hear her in pain. He can even hear her begging for them to stop. His arms are already bruised from trying to break the ropes that keeping him tied. He wanted so badly to burst in her cell and carried her in his arms and take her home. He wanted to let her know that he's alive and that he is going to keep her safe though he's not doing a good job at the moment.

The screaming suddenly stopped and it scared Hopper. He waited for another sound of her voice but there's nothing. At this point, he is wishing for her scream rather than hearing nothing because it's making him think of the worst. It's making him think that he has lost

her forever. Hopper couldn't hold it in and he screamed out loud. He couldn't do anything. That is his reality now.

The kids arrived at the Wheelers after long hours of driving. Jonathan crashed into their couch in exhaustion. He didn't make any stop along the way. He's very determined to get to Hawkins as fast as he can. Nancy and Mike's parents are on vacation with their sister so they got the house to themselves for a couple of days.

Will and El explained the whole situation to their friends and it alerted everyone. Steve and Robin arrived too.

"That is impossible though. The gate is closed permanently and the Russians are not here anymore. Who will do this?" Dustin asked.

No one knows the answer to their question. If they do, they would've made a progress by now.

"I think we should start where it all began. Maybe we can find something there", Robin suggested catching everyone's attention.

She's new to the group but she's been very helpful plus she's brilliant.

"I can drive. It's the middle of the night so I'm pretty sure we're not going to attract attention", Steve volunteered.

All looked at Nancy waiting for her approval. Since Joyce and Hopper are out of the picture and Jonathan is resting, she is the person in command.

"Alright...Steve, Robin, and I are going to the lab. All of you will stay here. Stay by the radios in case we needed some backup. When Jonathan wakes up, tell him his job is to look after you. Try calling your phone in New York too from time to time. Maybe Mrs. Byers would be home and there to answer", she instructed.

The kids are about to protest because they wanted to come with them but El raised a hand telling them to keep it to themselves. She understood. It will be no good of a help for them to go altogether. They will just draw attention and risk getting caught. Nancy nodded a thank you on her and the three grownups headed out.

"What are we supposed to do now?" Lucas asked.

"We sit here and wait. That's all we can do for now. We wait", Mike answered.

He and El looked at each other. They can't believe they're in a situation like this again. First, Will is missing. Then, Will has been possessed and after that, Billy and Hopper died. Now, Will's mom is missing. Mike can see it in her. He can see the self-blaming happening inside her. In her head, if it wasn't for her, none of this will happen. He held her hand letting her know that no one thinks that. He wanted to assure her that it's not her fault.

Will picked up the phone and started dialing. They all looked at him as tears fell from his eyes. He's been holding it in throughout their drive from New York mainly, to put a brave face in front of El but he cannot keep it forever. He slammed the phone down when no one picked up on the other end.

"Will..." Max muttered but didn't dare getting near him.

He tried again and dialed. He is sobbing now. He is desperately hoping that his mom will pick up, that they all just went paranoid and that she just decided to take a walk outside and bought a box of pizza, that she's waiting for them to come home. Suddenly, El took the phone out of his hand and set it down gently. Will looked at her and let himself cry. El couldn't help it either but cry. Joyce is her mom too. The kids gathered around them and showered them with hugs.

After an hour, Nancy, Steve, and Robin returned from the lab. They found the kids all asleep with Jonathan watching over them. He walked towards them gently so he wouldn't wake them.

"What did you find?" he asked.

"Not much...the gate is still closed", Robin answered.

"...but we found this", Steve said showing him a lighter.

Jonathan took it and stared at it.

"That's Hopper's", El intervened.

The four of them didn't realize the kids are all up and listening to them. El took the lighter from his hand. She's very certain. It's her father's.

"Wait...I thought the blast obliterated everything around that machine. Why is Hopper's lighter survived and it's not even burned?" Max asked.

"...because we think that he might've survived the blast", Nancy answered. All turned on her. "The other scientists were turned into ashes including everything they got on with them, clothes, watches, everything. If that lighter survived, that means Hopper could have to. There are chemicals in that lighter. It's very easy to explode if exposed to such power and heat but it didn't", she explained.

"...which means it was not exposed to it", Jonathan muttered.

"Exactly...there was this ladder at the edge of that platform. It is possible he was able to escape the blast", Robin added.

El's eyes lit up in hope.

"Where is he then? It's been months. Why he hasn't come back?" Mike asked.

Steve handed them a burnt paper. It's a file they recovered from the lab. The U.S. government destroyed all of their research but they managed to get that one. The kids tried to read the paper.

"It's Russian", Lucas noticed.

"Yeah, looked at the address", Robin instructed.

The kids all looked at the address on the paper.

"Kamchatka, Russia", they all read aloud.

Time passed and it seemed like a year for Hopper. Sometimes, he's not even sure if it's day or night. He depended on the meals being

brought to him every now and then. He hadn't heard Joyce since she stopped screaming and his mind is raising everywhere. He felt defeated which he is very sure is the general's goal. The general was right. He is a tough one to break but not when it comes to Joyce. She is the one thing that can see through him, see through the cold and jerkiness he's putting on as a mask and just look at who he really is. El can do that too sometimes but not as well as Joyce. She's very good at it. She is his kryptonite.

His meal came. A young soldier brought it to him. He's new. The usual guy has a mustache that bothers him very much because it's not properly trimmed.

"Hey", Hopper called to the young soldier before he turned around. "Do you understand English?" he asked and the young soldier nodded. "Good...can you tell me how long has it been since the general came to visit me here?" he asked.

The young soldier looked around seemingly afraid to be caught talking to their prisoner.

"Three days", he simply answered and then walked away.

Three days...it has been three days and he hadn't heard anything from Joyce. Now, he is afraid. He looked down the tray on the floor and noticed that there is a shiny little thing just underneath the plate. His eyes widened when he realized that it's a knife hidden there. Hopper let himself fell onto the floor so he can use his hands on his back to reach for the knife and free himself. The process is difficult and he struggled a lot but he is very skilled. Surely, the training he got years ago paid off. He was able to cut the rope in a matter of minutes. Underneath the water glass is a note. He picked it up and read.

Hey, Jim. I would've gotten you out of there myself but I cannot pass security so I bribed the young pal to give this to you. He said he cannot help you himself or they will kill him so I hope you can free yourself. Joyce is with you in there. They took her couple of days ago from New York. Her sons and El returned to Hawkins so they can get help from their friends. They're the ones who found out you're still alive and being kept there. according to the young pal earlier, they moved Joyce into the lab.

The key to the lab is inside the food. Get her and used the west exit. I'll be outside with a car. Also be quick, the plane is due to leave in half an hour.
– Murray Bauman.

Hopper shook his head and disbelief and smiled. He took the key from inside the food on the plate and left his cell to find Joyce. His moves are quiet but fast. Three guards walked by and Hopper quickly hid from their sight. Once he made sure they're gone, he resumed searching. There are a lot of rooms in the fifth floor of the building. He didn't bother investigating about the use of those. All he ever wanted right now is to find Joyce and take her out the hell they're in.

A bright room caught his attention. Unlike the others, it has glass window that allows him to peek inside. He's filled with shock when he saw Joyce on the table. She is unconscious and her nose is bleeding. He checked if there's anyone in the room with her and she's alone. Hopper quickly opened the door with the key Murray got for him and went inside.

Joyce is strapped onto the table. He can see the cuts on her head and on her lip. She got bruises everywhere and some needle marks on her arm like she's been injected of something. Hopper can't help but sobbed a little upon seeing her like that. He promised he will keep her safe and now she's got beaten up and god knows what else. He slowly reached for her neck to check her pulse. He sighed in relief when he felt it. She's alive. That's all that matters now, and he needs to keep it that way. He removed the straps around her and carried her in his arms.

Hopper followed Murray's instructions and used the west exit. He's right there waiting for them when they got out.

"Jesus Christ, Hopper...what happened to Joyce?" Murray asked as soon as he saw her.

"Just get us out of here", Hopper said and went in the car.

Murray quickly drove off away from the Russian military base. Hopper rested Joyce's head on his lap. He gently wiped the blood off her nose.

"We're going home, Joyce. We're going home", he said.

3. Chapter 3

Joyce remained unconscious throughout the travel time going back home. Hopper never left her side hoping that she will wake up. He wanted to make sure that he will be the first one she will see when she opened her eyes. He wanted her to know that he is alive.

Murray brought them to his new hideout still in Hawkins. He decided to move to the town to keep eyes on everything after Hopper 'died'. His house is complete with medical equipment needed for Joyce. After a few hours, the kids arrived at his house.

"Dad", El muttered as soon as she saw Hopper standing near Joyce's bed.

Hopper turned around and saw his little girl with tears in her eyes. He was about to say something when she suddenly ran to him and gave him a warm hug. He wrapped his arms around her and enjoyed the moment of being reunited with his daughter.

"I am glad to see you too, El", he muttered.

El has many questions for him but she knows it's not a good time. Her father just got back from Russian prison. There will be time for explanation.

Meanwhile, Jonathan and Will got frozen on the spot their standing on when they saw how bad their mother looked. The bruises are more evident in her body now. Murray hooked her dextrose up and looked at her stats on the monitor.

"What happened to her? What did they do?" Will asked.

"It's the Russians. They think that your mother and Hopper worked for the U.S. government. They tried to make her confess", Murray answered.

"...so they tortured my mom?" Will asked.

Murray only looked at him and he got the answer. Jonathan clenched his fist and walked out the door. Nancy was about to follow him but

Hopper stepped forward first.

"Hey kid, are you alright?" he asked when he found Jonathan outside.

"They did that to her. They hurt her. Why would they do that to someone like her? She has never done anything bad in her life. She never hurt anyone", Jonathan exclaimed in his anger.

"I know what you mean. It's not fair", Hopper muttered.

The young kid looked at the Chief.

"I am supposed to look after her, to assist her, to protect her and this happened. I failed her again like all those years ago when I cannot even protect her from my father", he confessed.

Hopper felt a lump on his throat. He remembered that time when he returned to Hawkins and he learned that Joyce married Lonnie. It only took a couple of days before he learned that he's been abusing her. He tried to intervene once but that's not much of a help either for Joyce.

"It's not on you, Jonathan. I am the Chief of Police and I didn't do enough to keep Lonnie away from your mother. I was just across the hallway and I wasn't able to get out of my cell in time to get her out of there. I was a little late. If there's anyone here to take the blame, it's me", Hopper explained.

The two men looked at each other and understood how much Joyce meant to both of them. They also understood that the most important thing right now is that she alive and back home.

The kids gathered in the living room all in support for Will. Murray told them that Joyce is dehydrated and lost a lot of blood. Luckily, Jonathan is a match. Nancy noticed the needle marks on Joyce's arm.

"What do you think they gave her?" she asked Murray still looking at the marks.

"I don't know. Truth serum, drugs, other stuff...I have no idea. Russians are not very predictable people", he answered.

Hopper sat next to Joyce's bed. He doesn't want to leave her side. Finally, Joyce opened her eyes. She first saw the ceiling of Murray's living room which she doesn't recognize at all. She groaned a little when she tried to move but her body is still sore.

"Don't try to move yet. You took a lot of beating", Hopper suddenly said.

Joyce almost stopped breathing when she heard his voice. Could it be real? She thought. He died. She saw him died. It could be another trick. The Russians are playing her again. She wanted to look at him so badly but she doesn't want to give in so easy. She went through it already, the mind games. She closed her eyes instead and tears fell from her eyes.

"You're not real", she muttered.

"What?" Hopper asked feeling confused.

He saw her hesitation. Though her eyes are closed, her breathing is heavy. Something is not right.

"Look at me, Joyce", he said but she didn't follow.

The others got on their feet watching the two.

"Come on, Joyce. It's me. I am not dead. I'm right here", he said trying to make her look at him.

Joyce squeezed her eyes more and shook her head.

"I already told you that I am not working for anyone. Why can't you believe me? I don't want to do this anymore, please", Joyce cried.

They all can feel the pain in her voice. She kept her eyes closed as tears kept falling from them. Hopper looked at Murray trying to get an explanation on why she's not opening her eyes and look at him.

"Russians...they must've injected her with hallucinogen of some kind...mind games. It's another form of sick torture", he whispered to him.

Hopper looked at Joyce. He noticed her hands are shaking in fear. The needle marks on her arm now made sense. He held her hand firmly and gently brushed her hair away from her face the way he always does and Joyce stopped shaking. She recognized that. No one has ever touched her like that, especially Lonnie. Only Hopper can do that. She finally opened her eyes and saw Hopper by her side looking right back at her with a smile on his face.

"Am I dead?" she asked thinking that it could be the afterlife. After all, she saw him 'die'.

"No, honey. You're in Hawkins", Hopper answered with a little smirk.

Joyce wanted to laugh but she's holding it in not wanting to fall for what she's seeing just in case it turns out into a fantasy.

"I don't know if this is real, Hop. I'm not sure if this is really happening. I mean, I saw it. I saw that machine exploded when I turned the keys. You were there", she said while crying.

Hopper wiped her tears away with his thumb.

"Do you remember that day back in high school when we ditched Mr. Grant's class to go the woods? I told you I found a clearing near the river and it would be a nice idea to have a picnic there. You said yes and you made sandwiches for us. I bought bottles of beers and packed of cigarettes. We went there with so much excitement but it was so far to go to by foot that when we got there, it's been raining already. Do you remember?" he asked recalling the past.

Joyce nodded as she laughed a little at the memory of it.

"You wanted to back out. You were so frustrated because it wasn't the way you planned it to be. You want the sun and the clear sky but I said no. I want to stay. We were both wet. I placed everything down the ground and handed you the sandwich and you laughed at me then you opened the beer. We had our picnic under the rain", she answered.

Hopper smiled as a single tear escaped his eyes. He held her hand tighter.

"This is real, Joyce. I am here. We all are. Those motherfucking Russians are never going to lay their hands on you again. I will make sure of that. No one will hurt you again. This is real. This is home", he said.

Joyce looked around and saw her sons and El along with their friends. Then, she saw Murray and she almost laughed. Everyone is there. She nodded in agreement. It is real. The minds games are over. She is home.

"I guess so", she muttered and smiled.

Then, her sons and El jumped on her bed to cuddle her.

"Easy there, kids. She's still recovering", Hopper said but they're already all over her so he let it go. He knows they missed her so much like he does.

The coming days had been easy. Joyce recovered fast and spent a lot of time with her family and Hopper. Murray let them stay in his house. They can't let Joyce and her family go back to their apartment in New York. The Russians know that address. Hopper is still 'dead' as far as Hawkins is concerned so he remains at home too. He and Murray thought about what they're going to say to people once Hopper returns to society.

"We could say that CIA found you and helped you with your recovery in return for your cooperation with regards to the Russian problem", Murray suggested.

"That sounds nice but why let me be dead?" Hopper asked.

"Well, for your safety. The Russians have to think that you're dead so they wouldn't come after you", Murray answered.

"Brilliant. Let's go with that", Hopper said.

After a few days, they released the statement that Hopper is back and the government supported that cover in return for the information Hopper gave to them including the location of the Russian prison cell

in Russia.

Hopper took Joyce out for a surprise. He kept her blindfolded along the way. Once they reached the destination, he guided her out and pointed her the right way.

"Ready?" he asked and she simply nodded in excitement.

He took the blindfold off showing her a house. Joyce's eyes widened upon seeing it.

"Hop, this was my house. What are we doing here?" she asked.

"Well, it's no longer for sale. I bought it", he answered.

Joyce turned around quickly and looked at him in shock. They left it after he 'died' and moved to New York.

"You bought my house? Why?" she asked again.

"So you wouldn't have to live in New York anymore. You can move back here and live with me", he answered so simply that it got her in awe.

She is lost for words for a moment. She cannot believe that he did for her and how casually he said that he wanted them to live with him. It sounds reasonable. He is El's dad and she's her legal guardian.

"Hop, I don't know what to say", she muttered.

"Say yes, Joyce", he said looking at her with such intensity. "We've been dancing around each other for a very long time. I've been dead and kept in a cell for months. I almost lost you back there. Do you know how hard it was for me to hear you scream and I couldn't do anything? I thought that I will lose you forever. I don't want that to happen again. I don't want to regret not doing something to be with you. I want to be with you, Joyce. I love you, always have been, always will be", he added.

She can see how much he meant it. She knows everything he said was true. She almost lost him too. Those days when she thought he's dead, she's beating herself up for being so stupid because she didn't

take the chance when he asked her out. She took too long. Not this time. She will not make the same mistake again. She put her hands on his face and pulled him to her and kissed him gently.

"Yes", she accepted.

4. Chapter 4

The kids were thrilled by the news of moving back in Hawkins and with Joyce and Hopper being together. Jonathan will go back to New York after a week to return to NYU. He will not stay in the same apartment as per Hopper's instructions. He is happy as well that his mom finally found someone who will not abuse her every single day. Hopper is a good man. That is all he needs to know.

While unpacking inside the house, someone knocked on the door. No one tries to move because they are so preoccupied with unpacking. Joyce laughed.

"I got it", she said.

Hopper looked at her and winked as he watches her got up from the floor and walked. Joyce simply rolled her eyes. She opened the door and halted when she saw Lonnie.

"What are you doing here?" she asked abruptly.

"Why? I can't visit my family anymore?" he asked.

She can smell the alcohol from his mouth.

"You're drunk again, Lonnie. This is not a good time to show the kids how you are when you're drunk", she said calmly.

Lonnie scoffed and then pushed the door knocking Joyce out the way and she landed back first on the floor. Hopper got alarmed instantly when he heard the loud noise. He almost sprinted to the living room followed by Jonathan. They saw Joyce on the floor with her hand on her back. Lonnie is standing inside the living room looking around.

"Mom? Are you okay?" Jonathan asked as he ran to her side.

"Yeah...I think so", she answered though her voice doesn't sound okay.

Lonnie turned to Hopper who is looking very pissed.

"So it is true, you are back from the ashes. You know I was really upset when Joyce and the boys moved to New York so when I heard they're back I immediately drove back here but then I learned you got in the picture playing house with my family", he said.

Hopper instantly knew he's drunk by the way he slurred his words. He wanted to punch his face but it's not really that worth it to punch a drunken guy.

"Go back home, Lonnie. Sober up then we can discuss this like two grownup men", he said trying to be calm.

"Fuck you, Hopper! You've been waiting this since you learned I got Joyce. You cannot stand it that it's me she married and not you. I got her pregnant twice and I got to do things to her you can only imagine in your dreams. You live here thinking you own her but you don't. I still own her. She's mine", Lonnie exclaimed pushing all of Hopper's buttons.

He grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and dragged him out of the house.

"Hopper!" Joyce called but it all happened so fast.

Jonathan assisted his mother to get back on her feet and they followed the two boys outside where Hoppe is already beating the shit out of Lonnie.

"Hopper, stop!" Joyce called.

Will and El followed and both are shock with what's happening. Joyce walked towards them and tried to separate the two guys and stop them from killing each other.

"Stop it now! Guys, please", Joyce pleaded but it's hard to get in between two brawling men.

Eventually, Lonnie hit her in the face and Joyce fell onto the ground and hit her head on a rock. Hopper let go of Lonnie and rushed to Joyce to see if she's okay. Her head is bleeding but she's conscious. Jonathan couldn't hold it anymore. He ran to his father and punched him in the face. Lonnie, shocked, just looked at his angry son.

"Go away, Lonnie. You got no place here", Jonathan said.

Lonnie hit him back but Jonathan didn't even move from the spot he's standing on. He simply wiped the blood from his lip and looked back at his father.

"I can take any hit from you but I will not stand here while you keep hurting my mom. Stay away from us or we will press charges and considering your reputation in this town, I'm pretty sure we will win easily and you will rot in jail", he said which shocked his father more.

Unsure of what to do anymore, he walked back to his car. Meanwhile, Joyce got a glimpse of what he did to her son. Though her vision is blurry, she got up and watch Lonnie got in his car. She is now blazing with fury something she hasn't felt before. How dare he come to her house and hurt them like that? Now, he's just going to leave like nothing happened? He brought nothing but pain to their lives and he still acts like he owes them something.

Lonnie tried to start the engine but it won't start. He tried a couple of more.

"Come on, you piece of shit", he cursed on the car.

Hopper frowned at the situation. He looked at Joyce and saw the anger in her eyes. It is a look he never saw before in her. It's like he cannot recognize her anymore with such rage in her eyes. It scared him.

Suddenly, El felt a wave of a familiar energy hit her. She stiffened. She's not sure how it's possible but she knows it is coming off of Joyce. Hopper turned to his daughter and saw the look on her face as she looks at Joyce. He turned back to Joyce and then to Lonnie's car which won't start. For a moment, he doesn't know what to make of it but then he understood it somehow.

The car started and Lonnie stepped on the gas but the car won't move. Joyce is just standing there looking hard at the car. She is just son angry. The memory of him hitting her son keeps on playing in her head on loop.

"Joyce", Hopper called for her attention but it's like she never heard him. "Joyce, look at me", he called again but still nothing.

Lonnie stepped harder on the gas trying desperately to get out of there in embarrassment.

"Joyce!" Hopper yelled and the car finally moved in great speed until it drove off the road and hit a large tree.

Everyone looked shocked at what happened, all except Joyce. She looked at the wrecked car with no emotions on her face. She then turned to look at Hopper who is looking back at her with shocked look on his face. They looked at each other's eyes and Hopper can see no trace of Joyce that he used to know. It's just empty and full of pain. Joyce's kind and loving eyes suddenly replaced by something dark. Then, Joyce fell unconscious as Hopper caught her.

Lonnie was brought to the hospital while Joyce is taken inside their house. Hopper told the police that he's very drunk that's why he crashed on the tree which is very easy to believe for them because of his reputation.

Will volunteered to look after his mother in her bedroom while the others are in the living room. Hopper got in after the police left.

"How is he?" Jonathan asked.

"He'll live but he got a lot of broken bones. He's in the hospital now", Hopper answered.

"He's so stupid. He shouldn't have drank his ass like that", Jonathan muttered.

El shook her head.

"It was her", she muttered.

"What do you mean?" Hopper asked his girl.

El looked at Joyce's bedroom door still thinking what she saw and the feeling she got from her.

"She did it", she simply answered.

"You're saying Mom did that to Dad's car?" Jonathan asked her and she just nodded. "El, my mom has no powers", he said.

Hopper remembered the look on her face earlier while Lonnie's car won't start.

"Tell me everything kid", Hopper said to her as they all sat down.

"There is this feeling whenever I used my power. It's like there is this force coming up from my feet going towards my head. It's hard to explain. Earlier, I felt it but it's not coming from my feet. It's coming from Joyce. I don't know how but I am sure of it. Trust me", she explained.

The idea is still hard to believe for the two boys but after everything they went through, anything is possible.

"Her nose didn't bleed", Jonathan noticed. "Your nose always bleeds whenever you used your powers", he added.

El looked at the door again like she's afraid to even touch it.

"She's different. The power is different. Stronger. Dark. Scary", she muttered.

Hopper got on the phone to talk to Murray. He asked him for a favor to hack something for him. He hesitated at first but he gave in when he learned it's for Joyce. She grew on him quickly.

After that, he took Will's place so he can rest with El and Jonathan. He sat next to Joyce's bed and watched her sleep. Will put a bandage on her forehead where the cut is. She got it from hitting her head on the rock after Lonnie hit her. Joyce got a cut on the side of her lip too. Then, he remembered the way she looked earlier. *She's different. The power is different. Stronger. Dark. Scary.* Could El be right about it? What if Russians did something else to her in that lab?

"Hop..." Joyce whispered.

He looked at her and there are the eyes he has always known, kind, warm, loving. It put a smile on his face.

"Hey, how are you feeling?" he asked.

"Like crap...what happened?" she answered then asked.

"You passed out", he stopped right there.

Joyce sighed.

"Jonathan...was he alright? I saw Lonnie hit him. Where is he?" she asked right away as soon as the memory came back to him.

Hopper held her hand preventing her from panicking.

"He's fine. He's in the living room with El and Will. They're all fine", he answered.

That brought a sense of relief in her. Seeing how Lonnie hurt her son made her blood boiled.

"...so Lonnie left then?" she asked suddenly which made Hopper frowned.

"You don't remember?" he asked her back.

Joyce frowned at him.

"Remember what?" she asked in return.

"Joyce, Lonnie's car crashed onto the tree across the road. He's in the hospital", he answered.

Joyce gasped, her eyes widened in shock. Even though he did nothing but hurt them, she still cares about his well-being.

"Oh my god...will he be alright? Jesus, I told him he shouldn't be drinking like that if he's going to drive", she exclaimed.

Hopper just watched in confusion. It is clear to him that Joyce remembers nothing of what actually happened. He grabbed her hand again and looked her in the eye. It might be a bad idea but he needs

to tell her what they think might have actually happened.

"Joyce...I know this will sound crazy but El and I think that you might have done to his car", he said.

"What?" she asked.

"What I mean is, we think you have powers like El, the mind thing. We think you might've crashed the car with your mind", he clarified.

Joyce got up and paced back and forth actually considering the ridiculousness of the idea. She cannot remember anything what happened so she got no proof but she also knows that Hopper doesn't lie, not to her. Plus, El thinks that too. The kid doesn't know how to lie.

"Joyce, listen, if it's true. I want you to know it's not your fault. He was...it's not your fault, Joyce", Hopper tried to calm her down when he noticed her breathing is getting heavier and heavier.

"It's really impossible that I have powers but if I have and Lonnie is in hospital because of me then it's not good. It is my fault because I almost killed him, right?" Joyce exclaimed.

"Joyce, it is not your fault", Hopper insisted and that's it. It broke Joyce's meter.

"Stop saying it's not my fault!" Joyce snapped and all the mirrors and glass inside her bedroom shattered into pieces.

The two looked at the mess around them in shock then to each other. Joyce looked down her hands which are shaking rapidly. She got the confirmation she needed.

"Joyce", Hopper called.

She looked back at him with her eyes filled with confusion.

"Hopper, what the hell is going on with me?" she asked.

5. Chapter 5

El volunteered to talk to Joyce alone to give her some insight about having super powers while Jonathan and Will cleaned the mess in her bedroom. Murray came over with some of his computer equipment to show Hopper what he found out. The two set up the computer in the living room and Murray started working his magic on it.

"Can you just tell me what you found?" Hopper said impatiently.

"Trust me. It's better that you see it with your own eyes", Murray replied.

Then the last click took them inside Russian system. Murray clicked a couple more and then opened a file named Project M. It showed a lot of video clips with different labels in Russian. Murray played one and let Hopper watch.

Video #1:

Joyce is injected with a serum in her arm. At first, she has no reaction to it then, a couple seconds passed and the effect took place.

"It burns", she muttered as she tries to break free from the handcuffs on her wrists. "It burns! Make it stop!" she yelled.

The doctors tried to prepare another syringe but the general stopped them when the lights flickered a little. A smile appeared on their faces then the lights stopped flickering. Joyce stopped screaming too. The serum lost its effect quickly.

"What the hell was that? What did you put in me?" Joyce asked angrily.

"A little recipe we cooked with some special ingredient. It's a breakthrough but it didn't last long. We need to double the dosage", the general answered.

Joyce started panicking.

"Please...I don't want to go through that again. Just let me go, I promise I will not tell anyone about this place or what you do here. Please", she

pleaded but they completely ignored her.

END OF VIDEO

Video #2:

Joyce is lying on the table and sweating a lot. She developed a lot of bruises since the first video and is very weak. The doctor injected her again with a serum. Three seconds later, Joyce started shaking as the lights flickered. The Russians watched in anticipation. Then, Joyce was able to break free on her own but fell on the floor afterwards due to lack of strength.

The general cheered at the progress and instructed his doctors in Russian.

END OF VIDEO

Video #3:

The soldiers carried Joyce and put her inside a glass tube. She looked around looking confused at what's going on. Water slowly filling in the tube. Joyce slammed the glass trying to break it to save herself from drowning but it's too thick to break.

"Please, let me out!" Joyce yelled from inside.

"If you want to save yourself, break the glass", the general said calmly.

"It won't break!" she yelled.

"You can break it, Ms. Byers. Use your ability", he said.

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about! Please, just let me out! You can inject me with that thing whatever the hell that was just let me out of here!" Joyce exclaimed desperately.

The water won't stop from filling the tube until she went under. She tried to kick and slammed the glass but still won't break. She's about to drown when suddenly the glass broke without her touching it. The water flooded the lab and Joyce landed on the floor soaking wet. She's coughing and

gasping for air.

The general and his doctors and soldiers clapped at their achievement. She was able to break it like what they wanted. Joyce, on the other hand, wasn't happy about any of it. She clenched her fist not caring that she's actually holding on to a broken piece of glass. Her hand started bleeding. She got up and with a wave of her hand, three doctors slammed onto the wall smashing their heads onto it. They all dropped dead onto the floor, their bloods spreading around. The soldiers armed themselves and pointed their guns on her. She flipped their guns and tossed it away leaving them defenseless. Then, she dropped onto the floor after the general shot her with a tranquilizer from behind.

"Marvelous, isn't she? Strapped her. Make sure it's tight. She's ready for testing", he said to his terrified soldiers.

END OF VIDEO

Murray turned off the computer. Hopper is too stunned to say anything. He knows they tortured her and beaten her up but he has no idea that they conducted an experiment to her too. It's all too much to do in one person, especially one innocent person like Joyce.

"Those needle marks...those weren't hallucinogen", Hopper muttered.

"Apparently not...listen, Hopper, I know it's hard to take this in right now but there is something else you need to know. While I was reading files in their system I found out that they got one of them in that building", Murray said.

Hopper looked at him.

"What one of them?" he asked.

"One of those things...demodogs, whatever the hell you call them. They got one. I also think that the serum they developed and injected Joyce with came from that monster", Murray answered.

Things started to scramble inside his brain. He heard how the other prisoners panicked whenever the soldiers took them out of their cells and they never returned. He always thought that they were executed

like gunshot on the head or hang but now it made sense why they're so afraid. It's that thing. They were feeding it.

"What would happen to Joyce if that thing's blood or DNA or whatever is running in her veins now?" he asked.

"To be honest, Hop, I don't know. They mixed it up with a lot of things. They did trial and error with her until they got the result they needed. According to the doctor's notes, the result was staggering. She was able to move things with her mind with effortlessness. The only problem that he noted was she changes whenever her power comes out", Murray answered.

Hopper remembered how Joyce looked when she was stopping Lonnie from leaving with his car.

"Changing how?" he asked.

"She's becoming violent, aggressive. She's losing control and has no regards with killing lives. She's being stripped off her emotions. She's becoming like those creatures. It's like they shared the same goal: to kill", Murray answered.

Inside Will's bedroom, Joyce and El are talking seriously. El explained to her how it worked for her when she used to have the power. Joyce listened carefully trying to understand what's going on with her. It is still unclear for them how she got it but she wants to understand it and how it works.

"It's hard at first but you will get used to it. I used to be so exhausted after using it. Papa would get mad because I couldn't do it again when he wanted me to so he will do anything he can to make me angry like lock me in that room with no windows until I can use my powers again", El shared.

The thought of El being locked in that room is making Joyce angry. It's not right. No kid should experience that kind of treatment. That is abuse. She knows that man is already dead but she cannot control her temper. El has become her daughter. It hurts her to know that someone hurt her that way.

"That is not right", Joyce muttered. The anger is very evident in her voice but she kept it inside as best as she can. She doesn't want to lose her temper in front of El.

The door opened and the two stopped talking. It's Jonathan.

"Mom, El, they need you in the living room", he said.

Murray, Hopper, and Will are waiting there. They're not supposed to show the video to the kids too but they cannot force them to leave because they wanted to know as well what's going on with their mother so Hopper let them stay. He trusts that they have matured over the things they all went through.

"Hop, what's going on?" Joyce asked.

Hopper took her hand and guided her in front of the monitor. He then nodded to Murray to play the videos he watched earlier. Joyce watched carefully as well as the kids. She cannot remember most of what she's watching. She remembered blacking out here and there while she's at the lab. She remembered the Russians playing with her mind, drugging her and pretending that they're her family to make her talk but it's not like what she's seeing. Then, she saw herself killed three men at the same time on the third video. She flinched a little but Hopper held her hand letting her know that she's not alone. Murray stopped the video and started explaining what happened to her.

Joyce tried to listen but his voice is drifting far away from her. Soon, it went silent in her ears. She can see Murray still talking as well as Hopper but she couldn't hear them anymore. Her breathing is becoming heavy again. She just feels so angry. After what El told her and learning what the Russians did to her, she's just overwhelmed with so much rage.

Everything started to shake around them. Jonathan grabbed El and Will to cover them in case anything falls down. Murray took cover under the table too.

"Joyce?" Hopper called as he looked around the house which looked

like is under an earthquake.

He looked at Joyce who is staring blankly into space. The emptiness and pain are back in her eyes. She's losing control again just like what the doctor noted in his file.

"Hopper! She's going to tear this house apart!" Murray yelled from under the table.

"Joyce! Stop this now!" Hopper ordered but she cannot hear him. She has drifted away.

Hopper suddenly asked out of impulse without thinking if it's the right thing to do. He grabbed Joyce on her shoulders and turned her towards him. He looked deep in her eyes trying to find a hint of the woman he loves so much.

"Joyce, this is not you. You don't want to destroy your home or scare your children. You love them so much more than anything in this world. Please, Joyce. Take control of your own body, of your own mind. Wake up, Joyce! Wake up!" he yelled at her and for some reason it got through her and it snapped her out of her thoughts. The shaking stopped and things returned to normal like nothing happened.

"Oh god...I lost it again, didn't i?" Joyce asked him. He didn't need to answer. She can see it in his eyes. "What the hell is happening? I don't know what's happening. Help me, please, Hop", Joyce breaks down as Hopper held her in his arms.

"I will find a way. I promise", he replied.

6. Chapter 6

Murray takes it to himself to investigate further about the Russian experiment on Joyce. Meanwhile, Hopper thought it would be best if Jonathan would take El and Will to the Wheeler's. With Joyce's unpredictable episodes with her new powers, he wanted the kids to be safe. Joyce agreed to it too. She doesn't want to accidentally hurt her kids.

"We can stay here and help", El insisted.

"I know you want to help but right now we need you to be safe and far from here. We can take care of this and I promise you I will take care of Joyce", Hopper explained to his daughter.

She wanted to protest but she knows she will not win. Will is on exact same page too with Jonathan but his big brother understood where Joyce and Hopper are coming from. If it's him, he will do exactly the same. He would want the people that he loves away from him so he wouldn't be able to hurt them. That day, they drove off to the Wheeler's.

Inside her bedroom, Joyce is trying to keep herself calm when Hopper walks in. He sat next to her on the bed. They stayed silent for a moment just letting each other search for words to say. Hopper turned to Joyce and saw a tear dropped from her eyes and fell on her arm. Her head is down trying to avoid meeting his eyes. She felt ashamed. For her, she's being a burden to all. She's causing too much trouble.

"Joyce, look at me", Hopper breaks the ice.

Joyce wanted to resist but she can feel his eyes on her waiting for her to look back so she did. Their eyes met and he can see how much she's in pain, not physically, deep inside.

"Tell me what you feel, Joyce. I am here to listen, no judgment. I promise", he said.

Joyce knew that. He never judged her not once in their lives. He's always there to understand her.

"Something is going on in me, Hopper. I do not understand it that much but I know it's bad. Those people did something to my brain and it's making me crazy. I am just so angry all the time. Small things will set me off. I am constantly reminded of the bad things that happened before, those things that made me sad or angry. It's all coming back like they happened yesterday. When I get angry, I cannot get over it no matter how hard I try. It just gets heavier and heavier and it's like I am sinking underwater and I couldn't get out. I feel like I'm going to lose my mind, Hopper", Joyce started.

It breaks his heart to hear talk like that. She's suffering inside and there's nothing he can do to stop the pain she's feeling, to clear the confusion in her head. All he can offer is himself for comfort. He wrapped his arm around her to keep her warm.

"I know. There is nothing that I can say to make everything better. I don't know how it felt. I've never been to your situation right now. All I can say is that you are not alone in this. We know who you are, who you truly are. You only know how to love. Everyone knows that. It is important that you know that too. Don't ever forget who you are so when you feel lost, you know where to go back to. We will always be here for you through whatever it is", he said.

Joyce leaned her head on his shoulder and just feel his presence and warmth. Him being there makes her calm. He is her anchor.

The night came and everyone is already asleep. Murray took the couch surrounded by his research while Joyce and Hopper are in the bedroom.

Joyce opened her eyes and saw the curtains swaying. The window is open. She doesn't remember opening it earlier and she's sure Hopper didn't do it. She quietly got out of bed to close the window so they wouldn't freeze inside. She's wearing Hopper's large shirt. Joyce is feeling thirsty so she went to the kitchen to get a glass of water. She made sure to walk quietly so she wouldn't wake Murray. The night is real quiet and it helps with her mind. She wanted peace and silence

so she stayed there for a few minutes just letting her brain breathe.

Finally, she's ready to go back to bed when suddenly everything around her disappeared and turned pitch black. She stopped walking holding her breath as she waited on what's going to happen next. She looked down and saw water on the floor. There is nothing around her, no furniture, no Murray, certainly no Hopper.

"Hello?" she called out and her voice echoed everywhere.

A loud growl alerted her. She turned everywhere but she couldn't see anything or anyone. She decided that it's another episode and a side effect of the experiment. She closed her eyes trying to wake herself up. It could've been a dream but she can feel a presence coming towards her. It's not Hopper. The vibration in the water is becoming stronger. Then, it stopped.

Joyce opened her eyes and saw the Mind Flayer right in front of her. She doesn't know what to do or what to say. She looked at its eyes for a moment and something in her snapped. Joyce screamed.

Hopper jumped out of the bed and ran outside. He found Joyce in the hall screaming hysterically.

"Joyce! Joyce!" he called while holding her shoulders. "Hey! I'm here. I'm here", he said and she finally met his eyes.

"Hop?" she muttered unsure if she's back in reality.

"Yes, it's me", he reassured her.

She jumped on him and held him tight which he returned. His eyes met Murray's as he stood in the living room startled by what just happened.

Murray made coffee for everyone while Joyce explained to them what happened and what she saw. Her hands keep on shaking as she narrates in details the place she went through.

"I'm sorry but I don't understand. You're saying you saw the Mind Flayer but Joyce, the gate is closed like for real closed. I almost died

from it, remember?" Hopper asked.

Joyce shook her head.

"I wasn't in the lab or in Star Court. One moment I was walking from the kitchen heading to the bedroom and then things disappeared around me. It was dark and there's water on the floor. It's so cold and quiet. Then, I heard something. I thought I was just dreaming or hallucinating so I closed my eyes but when I opened them I saw it right in front of me", she explained trying to keep it straight and now stutter all throughout.

"It must've been the same place El goes whenever she tries to find someone", Hopper said.

"What place?" Joyce asked.

"Whenever she used her powers to find someone, it's like she transports herself to another place. One time I asked her what it was like. She described it the same way you did, dark, water on the floor, quiet, cold", he answered.

Murray paid attention. He didn't know about that part of the Hawkins' mysterious history.

"Like when she got into the pool to find Will?" Joyce asked again and Hopper nodded.

"If you're in the same place as El was, then, you must've transported yourself too unknowingly. Were you trying to find someone?" Murray asked her.

Joyce thought about it for a moment. She remembered how the monster looked at her. It wasn't aggressive. It wasn't violent towards her. It just stood there and looked at her. Hopper noticed her silence like she's leaving some information behind.

"Joyce? What is it?" he asked.

"It knows about me and what I can do. It wants me to open the gate", she answered with her eyes closed remembering what happened in the dark.

Murray and Hopper looked at each other confusingly.

"How would you know what it wants?" Murray asked.

Joyce opened her eyes and looked at them.

"I can understand it like how I can understand you now. It talked through my mind and then it showed me what it wants. It wants to come through here in our world. It wants me to open the gate", she answered.

Joyce returned to her bedroom to sleep and rest while Hopper and Murray debated in the living room as quiet as they can be.

"This thing is now communicating with her. It knows she's got the power now. Do you know how that happened?" Hopper asked.

"I don't know, Hopper. Remember, her powers came from them. It came from their blood, their DNA so it's not surprising that she's link to them somehow or can understood them. It doesn't mean that they can control her like what happened with Will", Murray answered.

Hopper isn't convinced with that answer. He knows he can't ask too much from Murray after all, he's searching in the dark too like all of them.

"Joyce wasn't searching for anyone and the Mind Flayer pulled her out of her reality and brought her to that place to talk to her. Keep on looking, Bauman. I don't like to imagine the worst if they find a way to control Joyce", he said.

He then proceed to their bedroom to check on Joyce but he froze on the doorway when he found an empty bed.

"Where is she?" he muttered.

"Where is who?" Murray asked from the living room.

"Joyce, she's not here", Hopper answered.

The two went in panic mode and searched every room in the house

which is not a lot and they didn't find Joyce anywhere.

"She's gone", Hopper concluded.

In the hospital, Lonnie is in the ICU recovering from his multiple injuries after the car accident. There is no nurse posted on the counter and the hallway of the hospital is empty. His room's door opened as the lights in the room started flickering. The disturbance woken up Lonnie. He saw the lights acting funny but he cannot move his head due to the neck brace.

"Hello, Lonnie", a woman's voice greeted.

Lonnie tried his best to look at his side and saw Joyce standing next to him. Her hair is wet from the rain outside and she's only wearing Hopper's shirt and his jacket. Though soaking wet, she doesn't seem to be cold at all.

"What are you doing here? What the hell are you wearing?" he asked trying to be superior with his tone.

"I came to visit you. You seem to have not much. It shouldn't be surprising considering the number of your friends. Oh, wait...you don't have any. That explains why you're all alone in here", she answered in cold and taunting voice.

Lonnie scoffed.

"I don't need you here, Joyce. Go home, I don't need your help", he dismissed her.

Joyce chuckled.

"You think I am here to help you? Jeez Lonnie, after everything you did to me and my sons you expect me to help you? You're hysterical", she said.

No matter how much it pissed Lonnie, there's nothing he can do. He's stuck on his bed.

"Get out!" he yelled.

"Hmmm...in due time. I came here to finish the job, baby", she said and then leaned over to him.

Lonnie's eyes widened when he saw her eyes. It's different, not in color but it's so dark almost pitch black.

"I got this new power recently and I still don't know what else I can do with it. You know what it feels like, Lonnie? It feels amazing. It even feels better than sex if I'm being completely honest. Everything is becoming alive in me and I just feel so powerful. Guess that is making you feel so small, huh. Don't worry. It won't last long. In order to master this new power, I need to do some practicing, right? I messed up a little with you with the car because as you can see, you're still alive", she leaned to his ear and whispered, "I won't make the same mistake anymore".

Joyce pulled back from the very scared Lonnie and put her hand above his head and Lonnie started shaking, his heart rate increasing. The lights flickered rapidly until his heart rate flattened. Things went to normal. Lonnie is dead.

"Goodnight, Lonnie", she muttered and then walked away.

7. Chapter 7

Murray and Hopper searched the woods for Joyce but half an hour had passed and still there's no sign of her anywhere. Hopper noticed the police car on its way to their home so the two ran back. His two deputies are waiting for them at the porch.

"What's up?" Hopper asked as soon as he gets there.

"Chief, sorry to bug you at this hour but we need to talk to Joyce", one of them answered.

"Why?" he asked again.

"Lonnie is dead. He died half an hour ago", the deputy answered.

Murray and Hopper looked at each other trying to keep everything to themselves.

"That is terrible. She is inside resting. It's been a long day for her after the accident. I don't know how she'll take this but I will tell her myself once she wakes up", Hopper lied with a straight face. "Is there anything else?" he asked.

The two deputies shook their heads contented by his response.

"No. We just want to make sure that she will know it first and not get the news from the town. Goodnight, Chief", the deputy answered and returned to the car and drove off.

Murray and Hopper watched the car drove away until they can finally breathe.

"You just covered up for her", Murray muttered.

"She didn't do it", Hopper defended Joyce.

"Are you sure?" Murray asked.

He has doubts and considering Joyce's sudden disappearance, there is a great chance she has something to do with Lonnie's death but he

doesn't want to jump into conclusion first.

"We need to find her now", Hopper said.

"Should we tell the kids?" Murray asked.

"No. They will worry and they insist to help on looking. I don't want them to get hurt in case things get worse than it already is", he answered and the two started their search.

Meanwhile, Joyce is sitting on the edge of the cliff by the lake staring at the black pit of water underneath. Tears kept falling from her eyes uncontrollably. Flashes of Lonnie in agony as she took his life runs in her head over and over again. She used to have no memories of the things she does when her power took over but not this time. This time, she can remember. She remembers every detail, every word she said to him before she killed him.

Joyce shut her eyes hoping it will shut the flashes but it didn't help. The image of the Mind Flayer appeared in her head and she's reminded of what it wants her to do.

"No. No. I will not open the gate. I cannot let it happen again. The kids had been through enough", she said like she's talking to it.

A loud growl rang inside her head like the Mind Flayer is getting angry at her. She squeezed her eyes harder.

"I don't want this. I never wanted this. Make it stop", she muttered as she put her hands on her head.

Memories rumbled inside her head, the Mind Flayer, the Russians, Lonnie, the demodogs, Bob, Hopper, the kids. Joyce hugged herself on the ground keeping it all in. She doesn't want to explode so she'd rather suffer inside than potentially destroying everything around her. She lied on the ground along with the rocks and stared at the starless sky above.

"Make it stop", she whispered before closing her eyes.

The morning came and Joyce is still on the same spot sleeping. She's just a couple of inches away from actually falling over the cliff.

Hopper and Murray emerged from the woods. Hopper immediately saw Joyce at the edge prompting him to run as fast as he can to get her before she make a move that will throw her off the cliff. He grabbed her and pulled her away from the edge. Joyce opened her eyes in surprise and saw Hopper holding her. Hopper is so nervous that he just pulled her in his arms before saying anything else.

"Jesus, Joyce...I was so scared. I thought I lost you", he said in desperation.

Murray remained standing little bit far from them to give them some space. Hopper noticed that she is wearing his jacket and that she's barefooted. Her skin is cold from staying outdoors overnight. Her lips are pale almost the same as her skin. Then, Hopper pulled back to look at her.

"Where did you go? I was looking for you all night", he finally asked.

Joyce doesn't know what to say. She knows the answer, of course, but she isn't sure if she wants to let him know the truth. He might hate her forever or leave her. At her lost for words, tears answered his question for her. Hopper understood it right away. He knows she went to the hospital and that she killed him. She doesn't need to say anything. The guilt is right there in her eyes. He sighed deeply and that's when she knew that he knows Lonnie is dead.

"It wasn't you", he muttered in a low voice. Joyce frowned. "It wasn't you who did that. That was whatever the hell it is those Russians put in your head. It's not your fault, Joyce", he clarified.

Joyce didn't say anything.

"Don't do that", Hopper said.

"What?" she asked.

"Don't blame yourself. You're beating yourself up for something you have no control of", he answered.

She shook her head.

"Hop, I can remember what happened. I remembered going out of bed and sneaking out of the house. I remembered walking into the woods and going in the hospital. I remembered talking to Lonnie and saying those things to him. I remembered crushing his brain from inside his head and watching him die. Hopper, I remember everything", she explained.

He knew it's different and getting worse now considering she can remember but he knows it's not her fault. She's no killer. It's that demodogs' DNA doing that to her.

"That doesn't mean you wanted to do it yourself. I know you. This is not you", he said.

She wanted to believe that but the guilt is just overwhelming. The fact that she remembers everything is making it worse for her.

"Make it stop, Hop. Please, make this stop", she pleaded as she looks into his blue eyes.

Hopper looked back and he pulled back from her once he realized what it is she's asking him to do.

"Joyce, what the hell? I will never do that. No. We will figure out a way to deal with this together", he declined the idea.

"The Mind Flayer wanted me to open the gate. Do you remember how El did it? She got scared of those creatures that she lost control of her power and it opened the gate. Look at what's happening to me now, Hopper. I am losing control over myself and soon I will lose control over everything and that's exactly what it wants. I already killed one person, Hopper. Don't let me take more lives. You have to make this stop", she explained.

Murray couldn't believe what he's hearing. He knows Joyce has a point. Though the gate is closed, her connection to it is strong enough for the Mind Flayer to influence her actions. It cannot control her completely but it can manipulate her, drive her over the edge until she couldn't hold it together anymore and she loses control. It

will open the gate for the Mind Flayer and it will have full control of Joyce.

"This conversation did not happen, Joyce. There is another way and I will find it. You will not ask this from me ever again. Hell, you will never speak of this ever again. We will stop this together. Do you understand? You and me, together. I will not let you go again. I love you, Joyce, and I will not let you go", Hopper said firmly.

He then helped Joyce up but her knees are too weak so he carried her on his arms and they all returned to the house.

Hopper made sure that the windows are locked and that Joyce is really asleep inside the room before going to Murray in the living room.

"Tell me you found something useful", he said.

"Okay, I've been thinking about this a lot. El and Joyce's powers are similar right but El has more control over it than Joyce. El never lost herself while using her power. Then I asked myself why that is. El got her powers from the experiment done to her mother while she's pregnant. It wasn't done to her directly while Joyce received the serum herself", Murray started.

Hopper frowned.

"I don't follow", he muttered.

Murray rolled around his eyes like the answer is so obvious.

"Joyce was the subject of the experiment therefore she got the power, right? El wasn't the subject of the experiment and yet she got the power", he tried to expand for Hopper.

"Her mother was the test subject of Dr. Brenner", Hopper realized.

"Yes, but El's mother never had the mind power or any power of some sort which means something was not done right during her time in the lab. That's why it transferred to El. I was thinking if we repeated that process on Joyce the same exact way it was done with El's

mother, it might lessen the effect of the serum on her brain", Murray added.

"...makes her more in control of herself like El", Hopper concluded.

Murray nodded in agreement.

"Great...what do we need to do?" Hopper asked right away.

"We need to know how they did it with El's mother, the exact way, and then we need to find a way to get Joyce into the lab without her having any episodes", Murray answered.

"That's easy. Joyce will agree to do it. She wanted this to be over", Hopper said in as-a-matter-of-fact kind of way.

"Listen to me, Hopper. She and the Mind Flayer are connected. She's like its window to this world. Do you think it will let us cut its connection to her? She will fight back. Trust me. We need to prepare for that", Murray replied.

Joyce is inside the bedroom sleeping. Inside her head, she's once again in the same dark place with water on the floor.

"Hello?" she called out but no one answered.

She took a few steps hoping to find someone. El could travel anywhere without any trouble. Why can't she?

Finally, she stumbled upon a group of Russian soldiers talking and laughing with another. She cannot understand their words but it's like they're cheering on something. Then, she heard that familiar growl. A pale demodog appeared as it devoured a Russian prisoner. She realized where she is. She's back in Kamchatka. That's the creature they used to experiment on her.

"No", she muttered as she tries to step back but the creature saw her.

It stopped eating the poor man and turned to her. It didn't run or aggressively attacked her. It walked calmly and stopped right in front of her.

"The gate? No, it's not open and I will never open it for you", she said to it and it growled so loud.

Joyce focused herself. She kept playing Hopper's voice inside her head. It's keeping her herself. The creature tried to scare her but she's no longer scared of it. There is no reason to.

"I guess you have already spent enough time in our world already. Time's up for you, pal", she said and reached out her right hand to it and started twisting her hand like she's opening a doorknob slowly as the demodog screamed in pain.

It only took a minute before the creature fell lifeless on the floor. It's blood started flowing from it. Joyce kneeled down and touched its blood. Then, she opened her eyes and sat right up. She's back inside her bedroom. She remembered something and looked at her right hand and there it is...the demodog's blood.

8. Chapter 8

Murray and Hopper began their research on the experiment that was done on El's mother, Terry Ives. Hopper even asked El some questions about her time with Dr. Brenner even though he knows it might bring back some awful memories to his kid. El is tough. She wanted to help so she told him everything she knows. Joyce remained in the house fighting all the impulses she has. She kept being pulled into the dark by the Mind Flayer here and there convincing her to open the gate but she's able to fight it off and get back to reality. Sometimes, Hopper will catch her come to from that place but he never called her out. He knows she's doing her best to fight the Mind Flayer.

In the hope of creating technological advances and weapons from those creatures, they fostered a bridge between the Upside Down and this world through Joyce. It's not easy to fight her own mind and it's taking her most of her strength to get off of it. She needs help and she can see that they're doing their best to help her. She just needs to hold on a little longer.

Murray pieced all of the information they gathered together and began listing the procedure done on Terry Ives. Some of the chemicals used are hard to come by but he got his sources who owe him some favors. The stakes are high but he is very determined to help Joyce. He wasn't able to help Alexei when the Russian terminator shot him but he's not going to sit back and do nothing while the Russian experiment is slowly destroying Joyce.

Joyce gasped after coming out of another visit in the dark place. It took longer than usual and harder to come out to. Hopper stared at her watching how she's doing. He noticed how pale she's becoming each day. Blood started coming out of her nose. She wiped it casually before meeting Hopper's eyes. She nodded a little at him letting him know that she's fine. He knows she's not and she's just trying to put a brave face in front of him. Then, suddenly she tensed up.

"Hopper", she called.

"What is it?" he asked.

"They're moving", she answered.

"Who is moving?" Murray asked.

"Them in the Upside Down. He is gathering everyone. They're marching towards the gate", she answered.

Hopper and Murray looked at each other.

"She is the window", Murray muttered.

"They know we're taking you to the lab but they cannot get in. The gate is closed", Hopper said to Joyce.

They looked at each other. Hopper doesn't want to admit it but he already knows what's going to happen there.

"Hop...that gate will open one way or another", Joyce said.

"She's right. The procedure is bound to get a reaction from her. She might lost control of her power before the procedure is over", Murray said.

Joyce held his hand tightly.

"If it didn't work, if the whole thing didn't work, I want you to do it", she said. Hopper immediately shakes his head. "Listen to me, Hopper. We cannot risk them getting in here again. Think about our kids and the people living in this town. I am just one person compare to thousands. If something went wrong, promise me that you will toughen yourself up and be brave enough to pull that trigger on me", she insisted.

Hopper wanted to protest and tell her things will work out. Nothing will go wrong and she will be fine but he's not sure about that. The whole thing is a risk.

"Hopper, promise me. I will not go to that lab until you promise that you will do whatever it takes to stop them from going in our world", she said.

"I promise. I will do everything to stop them", he agreed.

They prepared everything and headed out to the abandoned lab facility. Murray has previously set it the place up so electricity won't be a problem. Joyce nervously watched the two boys set up the things they will need. She can feel the monsters closing in on her. They know she's near. Murray and Hopper set up the bathtub and filled it in with water and salt. While Hopper measured the salt in the water, Murray is putting the serums devised by Dr. Brenner before into the syringe.

Suddenly, the door went open and the kids went in including Steve, Robin, Jonathan, and Nancy.

"What the hell are you doing here? I told you to stay with the Wheeler's", Hopper exclaimed as soon as he sees them.

"We know what you're doing here. You're going to try to do to my mom what Dr. Brenner did to El's mom", Will said.

Murray frowned.

"We put a bug at the house so we can listen to everything going on", Nancy explained.

"What?" Murray and Hopper asked at the same time.

"You casted us out and we get it. It's for our safety but we don't like being kept in the dark. It's not like we're rookies in this kind of stuff. We're also in this. We want to help", Jonathan said.

Joyce looked not so good at the corner of the room. She chose to remain silent and ignore the bickering so she can stay calm.

"I know you wanted to help but this is not the time", Hopper said.

"We've been throwing the evil Russians off the trail for you guys. They came here to Hawkins but we managed to send them back to New York. They were looking for Mrs. Byers", Dustin intervened and that shut the two male adults.

"You don't think we'll stay out of action that long?" Steve teased with a smile.

Hopper sighed.

"Thank you for that. We really appreciate it but this is different. There are monsters waiting at the gate. If something goes wrong here, that gate will open and they will get in here. We don't want you anywhere near here when that happened and there is a great chance that gate will open", Hopper explained.

El took a step forward.

"We know. That's why we're here", she said. Hopper gave her a puzzled look. "That gate will open. We have to make sure that they will not get to Joyce before you're done with her or they will control her fully and we will not get her back. You fix her and I will take care of the gate. I will hold it as long as I can", she added.

That confused them more. Joyce looked at the young kid.

"How are you going to hold the gate?" Hopper asked.

El looked at the chair behind Hopper and moved it in front of him.

"I have my ways", she answered and then smiled.

Hopper has no idea how in the world El got her powers back but boy, was he glad she has it again. He simply nodded at his girl and the kids started dispersing. El, Steve, Robin, and Mike went towards the gate while Nancy, Jonathan, Will, Dustin, Max, and Lucas stayed and formed a barricade around the lab to protect Joyce in case some demodogs passed El's defenses.

Murray finally finished the preparation and turned to Joyce. Hopper walked towards her and offered his hand which she gladly took. He guided her towards the bathtub. Joyce removed her jacket and went into the water. It is cold but she doesn't mind at all. She saw Jonathan and Will looking at her with concern look in their eyes. They are worried. She wanted to tell them that everything's going to be alright but she's saving her energy. She knows she is about to go through hell.

"Ready?" Murray asked and Joyce nodded.

He took the syringe and injected the serum into her arm. Slowly, Joyce felt the burn in her body. She groaned but she kept it under control. The apparatuses in the lab started shaking as she struggles in pain. Hopper looked around observing how much Joyce's power is coming out involuntarily. The cold water is no longer helping for all she can feel now is the hot rush of the serum roaming her veins.

"It fucking burns!" she exclaimed in pain.

The shaking of the room increases. Jonathan couldn't bear to look at his mother. He grabbed Will trying to protect him from seeing their mother suffering. Hopper bit his lip as he watched the woman he loves groaned.

"Hopper...please...I can't do this. I can't do this. Make it stop! Make it stop!" Joyce pleaded but he knows it's not what she wanted. She wants to the nightmare to be over and dying is not her first resort to it.

"You can do this, Joyce. You are a fighter. When Will has gone missing, everyone thinks he's dead including me but you said no, he is not dead. You believed it so deeply that even when you're presented with a fake body, you still refused to accept it and you turned out to be right. When he was possessed by the Mind Flayer, you fought it as hard as you can until you got it out of him. You fought me so hard so you can prove to me that there's something more going on when your magnets fell off your fridge. This is just going to be one of those things, Joyce. This is going to be one another obstacles you will survived with flying colors because that's what you are. You are a survivor so fight now, Joyce. I need you to fight", he said.

Despite the pain that is clouding her judgment, his words got through to her and went straight to her heart. She's not ready to leave just yet. She's just starting out a new life with Hopper and the kids. Jonathan is starting at NYU and she just got a daughter. She got so much to fight for. She looked at Hopper and nodded. Murray put on the head piece that El used to wear when she was living in the facility on Joyce's head.

"This is going to hurt like hell", he said to Hopper.

Hopper looked at him.

"Can't you see her? It already hurts like hell so just do it", he snapped.

"Fine. Don't touch her or the tub", Murray replied.

He then took a deep breath and then turned the machine and the electricity flowed from it towards the headpiece Joyce is wearing. At first, Joyce tried to resist and the pain but she didn't last long. She let out an agonizing scream that is unbearable to hear.

Meanwhile in the basement, El and the others got in position. She can already feel the presence of the creatures behind the wall. There is no crack on it but they are there behind it just waiting for the gate to open.

"Do you think it's going to work, like really work on Mrs. Byers?" Mike asked El.

"It should. She got too much of their blood in her. It messed her brain. If we're going to cut the connection between her and the Mind Flayer, we need to burn it", she answered.

Steve and Robin looked at the two children talking.

"Burn it? That's going to be painful, too painful", Steve muttered.

El nodded.

"Yes. It will be painful", she replied.

"If she's going to be in so much pain..." Robin started to realize. "...all of her powers will come out", she finished.

Steve and Mike looked at the gate.

"This thing will open. She will open the gate", Mike muttered.

El nodded again while still looking at the wall.

"Yes. She will", she concluded.

Then, the lights started flickering fast. They all heard Joyce's scream from the lab and the ground started to shake. Steve grabbed Robin and Mike to prevent them from falling off while El doesn't need much help because she can balance herself using her power. They all watched as the wall in front of them started to crack. El readied herself as Mike, Robin, and Steve grabbed their weapons. Finally, they heard a loud growl coming from the crack. The gate is opened once again.

9. Chapter 9

Joyce screamed and screamed as everything around her shakes and falls. Her nose is already bleeding as well as her ears. She swears she can feel Hopper calling her name but she cannot hear him anymore. She cannot hear anything anymore. All of her senses are lost and all she can think and feel right now is pain, too much pain. Her body is burning and her brain feels like it's going to explode.

"Bauman! How long are we supposed to keep that thing on?" Hopper yelled at Murray.

"As long as the connection is still there...this will cut her ties with them completely", he answered.

Hopper looked back at Joyce and her scream reminded him the time that they were both Russian prisoners. She was just across the hall from him and he can hear her screaming and begging for them to stop. He couldn't do anything back then and he couldn't do anything now to ease the pain she's feeling. She is screaming and crying right in front of her and he wanted so badly to pull her into his arms and make her feel like she's not alone but then again, he can't do that.

"Guys, do you copy? The gate is open. I repeat. The gate is open", Mike said from the radio.

Hopper and Murray looked at each other then to Jonathan and the kids outside who got the same message from Mike. They readied their weapons outside in case the monsters come fast.

"Hopper", Joyce managed to say despite the agonizing pain.

He went beside her but didn't touch her or the tub.

"I am right here, Joyce. I am right here", he said.

"They're here", she uttered trying to hold back the scream. "They will be coming for me and they will make me do terrible things", she added.

"We will not let them get to you", Hopper said.

"You will die. All of you will. It's time for you to fulfill your promise to me, Hopper. Make it stop", she reminded him.

Hopper pulled back from her. For him, it is unthinkable. He will never hurt her. He can see now that she is serious about it. It's not the desperation talking but Joyce. She wanted to save everyone even if it cost her, her life.

"Hop, you promised you will do anything to stop them", Joyce said.

Hopper took a moment to think. He did say that but killing the woman he loves isn't on the list of what he's willing to do. He lost her once when he's not man enough to fight for her. He lost her again when he isolated himself when he found El and she ended up with Bob. He almost lost her when the Russians got her and tortured and experimented on her. Not now. He will not let that happen again.

"Yes, I promised I will do anything to stop them", he muttered then looked at Joyce. "Can you still feel them?" he asked.

Joyce frowned but nodded.

"It is coming out, Hop. It is already calling for me", she answered.

Hopper took a deep breath and nodded at her before turning to Murray.

"Turn it to max", he ordered.

"Hopper, she can barely stand it right now", he tried to explain but Hopper stopped him.

"The connection is still there. Like you said, we need to cut it. Turn that thing to its maximum now", Hopper repeated and Murray obliged hesitantly.

Joyce screamed once again louder this time.

At the basement, Steven and Robin kept on shooting their guns at the demodogs that kept coming out of the gate while El is using her power to kept the hole small. She just got her power back but she

doesn't have it back completely. It's not as strong as it used to. The act of minimizing the gate is already draining her.

"El, are you alright?" Mike asked.

"Yeah, I am", she lied.

Back in the lab, Jonathan and Nancy set up gas outside the room and lit it up to form a barrier in order to protect Joyce. They can still hear her screaming and everything is still shaking. Another hour of that same shaking, the whole building will collapse.

"It will be over soon. It will be over soon", Will kept on repeating to calm himself.

Jonathan grabbed his hand and nodded at his little brother.

Suddenly, Joyce stopped screaming and the building stopped shaking. The whole electricity of the place, and the entire town, is zapped.

Hopper went to Joyce slowly. She is unconscious. Her blood has mixed up with the water in the tub. He removed the headpiece on her head.

"Joyce? Joyce?" he called but she's not waking up. "Come on, honey. Open your eyes, please", he pleaded but still nothing. He pulled her out of the water and brought her close to his arms. "Joyce, baby, wake up. Come on. Wake up. Don't do this to me. Come on! I told you to fight!" he yelled.

Murray sunk on the floor due to lost of hope. He cannot bear it if Joyce has died due to the 'solution' he pitched in. It's his responsibility.

"Baby, wake up. Just wake up, please", Hopper pleaded as tears fell from his eyes but Joyce is not waking up.

Jonathan, Nancy, Will, Lucas, Max, and Dustin are all watching through the window what's happening inside. Will held on tighter to his big brother. They both refused to believe that there is gone but their eyes are telling them that it's over. She's not waking up.

Steve and Robin are running out of armory to fight the demodogs. Mike began throwing firecrackers at them to make them fall down the pit. El used both of her hands to keep the gate's opening small. Both of her nose are now bleeding including her ears. She cannot keep it up any longer. Any moment from now, she will fall and the gate will be truly open and the Mind Flayer will come to their world. The veins underneath her skin are starting to appear as she gets paler and paler.

Mike ran out of the firecrackers but he got the last one of the demodogs. El screamed trying her best to keep it under control but she already ran out of energy and she fell down. Mike quickly ran to her and helped her sit up. Steve and Robin went to them too.

"I'm sorry. I cannot hold it anymore. I am not strong enough like I used to", El apologized.

"It's alright. It's alright", Mike said trying to make her feel better.

"No, it's not alright. The Mind Flayer will come here now. There's no one stopping it now", El explained.

Steve and Robin watched as the demodogs came out of the gate one by one. It's like all their hard work earlier in killing them has been wasted. They're back and they're much more. On top of that, they got no weapons anymore. They're trap and El is down. Mike knows that too. He knows that they're probably going to die now but he would rather that than force El to use her power when she cannot do it anymore. El, on the other hand, wanted to fight but her body couldn't take it anymore. She cannot even move her legs. It's been awhile since she used her powers like that. Tricking Russians and moving chairs are nothing compare to trying to close the gate by herself.

"It's been an honor meeting you and getting to know you, Steve Harrington", Robin said to Steve.

"It's been a pleasure having you as my friend, Robin", he replied and they shook their hands sealing their impending doom at the hands of the most violent predators they know.

"Mike. Forgive me", El apologized once again with tears coming out of her eyes.

"Hey, it's alright. I wouldn't want to have it any other way, okay? I would still be right here with you no matter what and if this is the end, I am happy to die right here with you, El", he said with a smile on his face.

El returned that smile and they shared a kiss. The moment was interrupted by a loud growl coming from the gate. The demodogs stopped moving like they got frozen on the spot. They all looked around noticing the odd scene.

"What the hell is happening?" Steve asked.

"They all stopped", Robin noticed.

"It's coming. The Mind Flayer is coming", El said.

Then, they saw its long legs coming out of the gate. No matter how deep the pit is, its legs can still stand on it like the height was nothing. Then, its body came out and finally its head. It's larger than they expected or imagined. Its height broke the concrete ceiling of the building but not enough to reveal itself from the whole world, thanks to the pit.

"Holy shit..." Steve muttered.

"Yeah...holy shit", Robin repeated.

The Mind Flayer pulled a little before revealing its tentacles aiming at them. Then, it attacked. Steve, Robin, El and Mike closed their eyes accepting their fate when they noticed nothing hit them. They finally opened their eyes and saw the tentacles just a couple of inches away from their faces but they're not moving at all. They're frozen.

"What?" Mike muttered.

They all turned around and saw Joyce standing behind them with the others. She got one arm raised. Hopper and Murray helped Mike and El out of the way while Steve and Robin joined the others behind Joyce.

The Mind Flayer growled at Joyce and fought her power. The demodogs started to move but Joyce waved her other hand and they smashed onto the wall and fell off the pit too. The monster growled more. Joyce's eyes turned pitch black and veins appeared underneath her skin. She now used both of her hands to fight the Mind Flayer. She twisted one hand and it broke two of the creature's legs. The loud screech made by it caused pain to their ears but not to Joyce's. She doesn't seem to mind. She's so into fighting the Mind Flayer that all of her focus are on it. It tried to communicate with her again, trying to get into her head.

"I don't understand you anymore, bastard. I'm no longer your slave", Joyce said to it and it pissed it more.

Joyce stepped back a little. The monster is fighting her off and it is strong. Joyce's nose started to bleed as well as her ears. She kept on breaking the monster's body parts until she already crippled it. She wanted to kill it so badly but she knows that she's not going to be able to do it. If she pushed it, she'll die and that is not the goal at the moment. Instead, she used powers to push the Mind Flayer back into the gate. It managed to fight and used its broken legs to stop Joyce from sending it back to where it came from but broken legs are not that good of an anchor. It flew backwards into the gate. Now, free from fighting the Mind Flayer, Joyce turned her power into closing the gate. It took a of her energy but she's not going to stop until it's fully closed. Once she saw that there's not even a single scratch on it, she finally let it go. Joyce fell backwards but Hopper caught her in time.

"You did it. You closed it", he said to her.

"I know I did but it is because of you", she replied while catching her breath. "Now, can we please get out of here?" she asked.

On the way out, they were greeted by Russian soldiers waiting at the grounds for them. Joyce immediately saw the general with the same smirk on his face.

"Give us the woman and we will not kill you", he said.

Joyce let go of Hopper and walked towards them. Hopper didn't even try to stop her. He just let her go. Joyce threw the soldiers away from her, breaking their necks as they hit the trees. She flipped their guns away and broke their necks with a twist of her hand. Then, she turned to the general and grabbed him by his neck without touching him.

"Please, don't kill me", he pleaded.

"Who says I will? No, I will not kill you. You will spend the rest of your days with the CIA as they torture their way for you to talk. It's time for you to know what it feels like", she said and then knocked him out.

Hopper looked so proud of his girl.

"Now, we can go home", he said.

10. Chapter 10

Hopper called in a favor at the government about the mess that happened at Hawkins Lab. They reluctantly agreed to his terms but considering he handed them the Russian general, they are more than grateful. It turned out that they have been chasing him for years and now they finally have him. The State will release a report about an earthquake that occurred that night which caused electricity black out throughout the town. Hopper hid to the government about El and Joyce's powers because he knows they would want to take advantage of that as well.

Joyce is preparing El and Will's bag. The two are planning on spending the day with the Party. Joyce is all for it. She wanted them to feel normal and like kids again after all the horror they went through. Jonathan arrived with his car.

"Kids, your brother is here! Come on!" she called out.

Will and El came in running the living room. Will grabbed the bags, put a kiss on Joyce's cheek and ran outside towards the car. Meanwhile, El stopped and looked at her mother like she wanted to say something.

"What is it?" Joyce asked.

"Do you still have it? I mean, the superpower?" El asked.

Joyce went silent for a moment and then nodded.

"Yeah, I still have it", she answered.

"You looked scared. Why?" El asked again.

"I don't know, sweetie. I guess, I am just not used to it. That's all", she answered.

El sighed.

"You don't want to lose control again. I get it. It can be hard to

control at first. Trust me. I did my damage during my time. I opened the gate, remember? Believe me. You are handling it way better than I did the first time I found out I can move things with my mind", she said.

Somehow, it made Joyce feel a little better when El said that. If El approved the way she's handling her power, then, she must've been doing a good job at it.

"Thank you", Joyce said.

El gave her a smile and then went out to join Will and Jonathan.

After dealing with the political matter of his job as Chief of Police, he went home and rested his hat on the coffee table at the living room. The house is quiet which alarmed at some level. A loud bang in the kitchen set him off. He pulled out his gun and went straight to it. He found Joyce trying to cook something.

"Hey, Hop", she greeted when she saw him walked in but her smile dropped when she saw his gun. "It's alright. I just dropped the pan", she explained.

Hopper sighed and put back the gun in the holster. After everything that has happened in their family, he is not taking any chances. It kept him at the edge.

"What are you doing? You should be resting. Let me cook for you and you can rest and watch some TV", he said.

Joyce put down the pan and walked towards him and put her arms on his shoulders.

"Stop worrying about me. It's over. I don't need to rest. I need to enjoy life. We all do. You all stuck by me despite me being at my worst. Let me do something to thank you. I want to take care of this family", she said.

"Joyce, that's my job. You've been through a lot these past few days. I don't want you forcing your body to move too much", he explained.

Joyce chuckled.

"You know you're cute when you're worried", she teased and it made him smile. Suddenly, Joyce's smile vanished from her face.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I still have it, this ability. I know I'm free from the Mind Flayer but it scares me, Hop. I am not used to this feeling. It's really tempting. I feel like I can do just about everything. What if I lost control again?" she answered then asked him back.

Hopper put both hands on her tiny face.

"That will not happen as long as I am here. But if it does, you can rest assure that we will all be here to help you out because that's what family does. We stick with each other. We will always be here for you", he answered.

She knows that. She just wanted to hear him say it so she will feel better. His words always soothe her.

"Well, I know this is totally random but I have to say it", she started.

"What?" he asked curiously.

"El and Will are at the Wheeler's and Jonathan went out on a date with Nancy so I think we got the house to ourselves for the day", she continued.

"Where are you getting at?" he asked again.

"I say we ditch the breakfast and we just spend the entire day inside the bedroom. I promise I will keep you occupy you will not miss the food that much", she suggested and then smirked.

Hopper chuckled and made a face like she couldn't believe it was her who asked first.

"I don't want to wear you out", he teased back.

Joyce scoffed. She then waved her hand and the bedroom door

opened. Hopper looked stunned at how casual she used her power. She's normally ashamed or shy about it. Then, Hopper's feet floated a little from the floor.

"Joyce...what are you doing?" he asked nervously.

"You say you will wear me out?" she asked repeating his last statement.

She began walking while Hopper floated backwards and they both went in the bedroom. Joyce dropped him onto the bed and then smiled. Hopper got excited by how things are turning out. She waved her hand one last time and the bedroom door closed as the two laughed at each other.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR READING! I HOPE YOU HAD FUN AS MUCH AS I HAVE WRITING THIS. #JOPPER